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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2265
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KUALA LUMPUR 000318

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [TH](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: MALAYSIANS ON BORDER CONCERNED, BUT NOT ALARMED
OVER SOUTH THAI VIOLENCE

REF: A. 06 KUALA LUMPUR 1764 - NO TEARS FOR THAKSIN

- [¶](#)B. 06 KUALA LUMPUR 1976 - SURAYUD'S VISIT
[¶](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 263 - MALAYSIA SAFE HAVEN FOR
INSURGENTS

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b
and d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (S) Malaysian politicians and police officials in northern border states, in meetings with polchief February 5-9, expressed concern but not alarm over continued violence in Thailand's ethnic Malay south. Interlocutors viewed the violence in Thailand as having little or no spill-over effect into Malaysia, despite a visibly porous border and acknowledgment that insurgents use Malaysia as a refuge. Malaysians of all walks appeared resigned to violence continuing in southern Thailand for the foreseeable future. Malaysian police affirmed matter-of-factly that they have their own assets inside Thailand who provide useful intelligence. Police asserted that they received no recent official requests from Thailand for the return of wanted militants, in part because of the cumbersome, time-consuming procedures required under Malaysian law. Fear of violence has curtailed cross-border traffic in Kelantan. Following the February 18-19 bombings across the border, Malaysia warned its citizens to stay out of southern Thailand. End Summary.

Sympathy for Malays, but No Support for Separatists

[¶](#)2. (C) Polchief met with senior politicians, top police officials and civil society members in Malaysia's northern border states of Perlis, Kedah, Perak and Kelantan during the period February 5-9. In over a dozen separate meetings, these Malaysians almost uniformly expressed concern and sympathy for ethnic Malay Muslims, viewed as caught up in the violence in southern Thailand. Malaysians placed significant blame on the Thai Government and Thai security forces for creating conditions that led to unrest. No one we encountered, however, voiced support for Thai Malay militants or separatist goals. While most Malaysians hoped that their government could play a peace-making role, none spoke out forcefully or emotionally to argue for Malaysia to intervene without Thailand's consent. Politicians representing the dominant UMNO party and the opposition All-Malaysia Islamic

Party (PAS, the Islamist party which controls the Kelantan state government) said that the southern Thailand situation was not a pivotal voting issue for their constituents. Almost all Malaysians we encountered readily admitted the occasional presence of Thai Malay militants in Malaysia, but most described this as a natural outcome of having family and ethnic ties in Malaysia, rather than representing an organized support service or any active assistance from within their country. Although all believed the post-Thaksin government in Bangkok had adopted more conciliatory rhetoric, opinions varied as to whether this would translate into significant changes in Bangkok's actions. Noting the increasingly complex nature of the conflict, Malaysians of all walks appeared resigned to violence continuing in southern Thailand for the foreseeable future.

¶3. (C) Husam Musa, de-facto Deputy Chief Minister for Kelantan state (largely responsible for running the state government on a daily basis) and an up-and-coming leader of the opposition All-Malaysia Islamic Party (PAS), proved the most reluctant to share his views on the cross-border situation. Speaking in his office, Husam refused to be drawn into a discussion of the border situation, quickly asserting that there was no connection between matters in Kelantan and southern Thailand, and that what happened inside Thailand was strictly Thailand's affair. (Comment: We interpreted Husam's remarks largely as a reaction to occasional allegations that the Islamist PAS government was overly sympathetic and perhaps secretly supportive of Thai Malay separatists. We heard no such allegations during this visit, however, even from PAS opponents. End Comment.) In contrast, other more senior PAS leaders, including Speaker of the Kelantan State Assembly Wan Rahim and PAS Commissioner for Kedah State Azizan Abdul Razak, did not shy away from sharing

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their views on southern Thailand, which echoed those of other Malaysians (above).

Party Line: No Spill-Over

¶4. (S) Top police officials in Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan states, including state-level Special Branch chiefs, stated that Malaysia experienced very little or no spill-over effects from violence across the border, though some believed there would be a risk if the violence continued over the longer term or increased. The risks would include cross-border criminal activity and narcotics trafficking. While most police officials boasted of Malaysia's ability to control its side of the border, they also readily acknowledged that Thai Malays, including some militants, frequently crossed into Malaysia and worked illegally in the country. The fact that the Malays on either side of the border are virtually indistinguishable from one another made immigration enforcement extremely difficult. (Comment: Malaysia has announced its intention to proceed together with Thailand on a biometric identification system, part of an effort to end dual nationality among border residents and strengthen border control. Malaysia does not recognize dual nationality. End Comment.) Police recognized Kelantan, in theory, as the most vulnerable border state due to its proximity to violence-prone areas in Thailand.

Malaysian Assets Inside Thailand

¶5. (S) Police officials explained that their confidence in their ability to protect Malaysia from the ill-effects of the southern Thai violence rested in part on Malaysia's good intelligence network within Thailand. This included Malaysian "assets" within Thailand's border areas, the police noted matter-of-factly. In response to polchief's questions, police officials said they had received no recent requests from Thailand to return wanted militants. Malaysia would insist on Thailand following Malaysia's lengthy and

cumbersome legal procedures for such extradition requests, and would no longer carry out informal renditions. In the context of this discussion, several police officials recalled past incidents of Thai security forces carrying out extrajudicial killings of suspected militants after they had been turned over by Malaysian officials.

Kelantan Elites Curtail Visits

¶6. (SBU) Malaysian officials in Kelantan described a significant downturn in registered border crossings since the resurgence of violence in Thailand. Kelantan elites told us that, because of the risk of shootings and bombings, they had largely stopped traveling across the border for shopping or recreation (such as nightclubs, brothels and alcohol, all illegal and/or largely unavailable to Malays in Islamist-controlled Kelantan). Malaysians' travel into Thailand from Perlis and Kedah states appeared largely unaffected.

Visibly Porous River Boundary

¶7. (SBU) Polchief visited Malaysia's relatively populous Sungai Golok border area in Kelantan and observed multiple small boats traversing the narrow river, which serves as the international boundary, without any controls on either side. Some of the uncontrolled crossings took place within sight of the formal border crossing point.

Malaysia Warns Its Citizens to Stay Away

¶8. (U) Following the February 18-19 bombings in Thailand, Malaysia's Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, speaking to reporters February 19 during a Middle East visit, warned Malaysians to avoid visiting southern Thailand and getting "caught in the crossfire." Hamid added that, "All these incidents should be an important indicator for Thailand to urgently push for peace and stability in the area and increase security there."

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Comment

¶9. (C) We believe it noteworthy to emphasize what we did not encounter on this visit to Malaysia's northern border: we heard no expressions of support for Thai Malay militants, either their aims or tactics; no calls for urgent intervention, behind the scenes or otherwise (ref C represents somewhat of an exception); no rumors against Malaysia's Islamist party for alleged involvement with Thai Malay separatists; and no sense of alarm over any potential impact on Malaysian soil. Our findings tracked well with those of other diplomats and an international reporter who also recently visited Kelantan. While Malaysians close to Thailand are concerned about the violence across the border and sympathetic to the plight of ethnic Malay Muslims, they appeared resigned to the unrest continuing in southern Thailand and relatively assured that Malaysia would remain insulated from the ill effects.

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